

## MESSAGE FROM THE PAST-PRESIDENT

### David L. George

This will likely be my last opportunity to address you through the *Journal* as an Executive Committee member of the Society. In a few short months I will join the ranks of many fine former SMPTE Presidents whose experiences are always valued and whose counsel is still sought from time to time. As it was for them, SMPTE has been important to me both personally and professionally for many years. And while my experience may span a different time frame than theirs, or yours, there have always been industry, career, and professional challenges that the Society has helped me face.

For example, in recent months we have heard much about the economic friction between the old and new economies. This drama is being played out in major stock markets all over the world. In developed areas the old financial system is characterized mainly by machines, materials, and manufacturing; in the new, by information and its generation, dissemination, and control. A broad-brush view suggests a fundamental change in the evolution of the world's economy, as it becomes largely knowledge, not production-based, and operating in electronically connected rather than independent clusters. The wealth of nations, business revenues, individual income, employment, position, and power are increasingly being determined by how effectively we understand, adopt, and apply our knowledge assets while exploiting these new information structures and technologies.

However, the world is a complex place and not all regions have the same degree of economic maturity. While many countries still struggle to catch up with old economy norms, in the more developed regions over half the value of all the goods and services now produced is rooted in knowledge and how we share it. In the new economy this rather ethereal wealth will become a more important factor in ensuring success than any level of physical effort or material investment might once have been.

Within our small section of this global shift, we find ourselves at the leading edge of change in virtually every region in which our members are active. Everywhere, industries have been transformed by the same basic technologies that have supported the information explosion. In motion imaging, in particular, there are few physical or political boundaries to the adoption of new technologies and techniques. Indeed, otherwise restrictive political regimes often are among the first to adopt the tools that will spread their message more effectively. So, in some regions the media industry is leading the way to the eventual new economy, rather than following it; but nowhere is it far behind.

Wherever our members operate, whatever their medium, technological change has provided more capability to tell stories better, more compellingly, and at less cost. New films demonstrate the power of the marriage of chemical and electronic production to bring complex stories to life. New technologies have made it possible to fund the creation of compelling entertainment and information extravaganzas that combine the best in contemporary craftsmanship, technology, and creativity. On the one hand, this has made it possible for us to more fully experience a particular media offering; on the other, it has supported additional conventional experiences at lower individual cost. The convergence of technologies, under discussion for so long, is making this possible. Video, television, and computer technologies have merged to the point where it is often difficult to tell them apart. Bits of information scattered among a RAID array may physically constitute a valid program, but hardly in the way a roll of film does. Existing and

manipulated as ones and zeros, it has closer ties to raw data than to the form and chemistry of traditional picture elements.

Sharing a common digital foundation, images and data have both benefited from increasing computational power and lessening costs. We have learned how to squeeze digital picture

information into ever-decreasing amounts of data space. We have crammed these compacted data streams into the growing information delivery networks, changing the concept of spectrum scarcity, which justified the regulation of what was once a scarce public resource to one of spectrum abundance in which free and unfettered access is both possible and warranted. Lower costs have made it possible to fill many more of these pipelines with specialized programming; more programming generally means smaller individual audiences; smaller audiences mean less revenue for traditional exhibitors for each program play; less revenue drives the search for even lower origination, exhibition and delivery costs; and less costly approaches generally employ newer techniques supported by the latest and most capable technologies. Technical skills and knowledge are needed to develop and deploy these new systems. And so it goes round and round, in the process transforming formerly mainly creative organizations into knowledge-based ones.

For knowledge-based organizations, the most important resource is access to a skilled and knowledgeable workforce. Educated workers and, even more important, an ability to continually update their training is a critical determinant of success. Increasingly, due to economic pressures to continuously improve efficiency, the responsibility for a worker to remain current is being passed from the organization to the individual. So much information is available, however, that it overwhelms our individual ability to select from among it that which is of use to us from that which, in reality, is not. Key to success is an inquiring mind, a positive attitude about learning, and ready access to some sort of trustworthy primary sieve, such as SMPTE, that can organize and present information of use to us as practicing professionals. Lifelong learning is a necessary ingredient in this environment, and your Society, as I have pointed out previously, provides a range of instruments in an arsenal of analytical and decision making tools.

SMPTE is a prime provider of relevant information and professional support. Through its engineering, publications, papers, conferences, training, seminars, and section activities it also offers the foundation for peer interaction and information sharing as well opportunities to meet and network with other professionals in the field. In this fast moving environment, active SMPTE membership can be an important part of your strategy for success, no matter where you live. Through SMPTE, you can access several powerful, portable, permanent, and professional information and application tools with which to address the challenges of the new economy and manage the evolution from the old.

It helped me make the transition from the world when it was flat. It can help you too!

—David L. George



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